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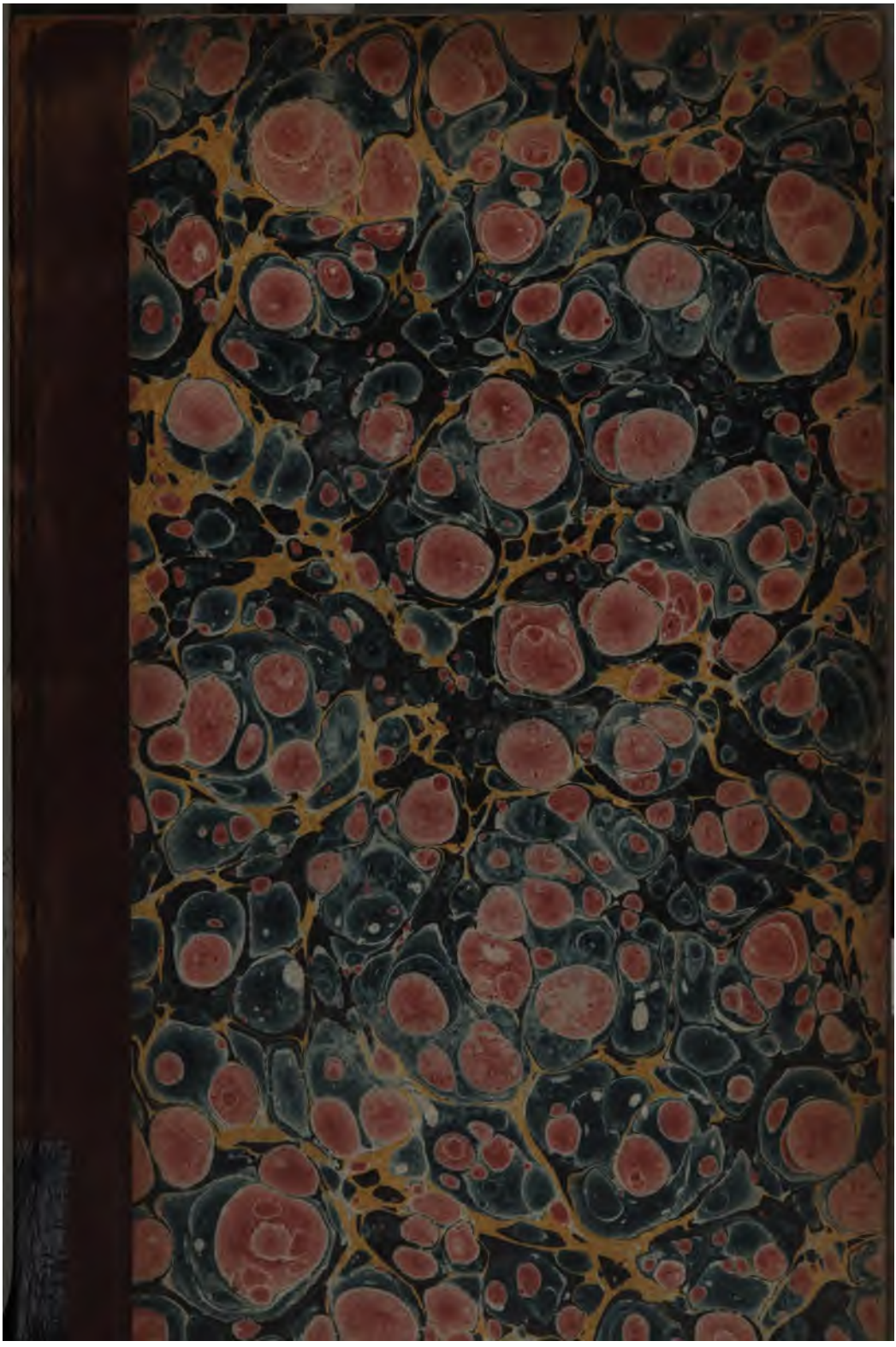

600082758-

MORDECAI:

OR,

THE JEW EXALTED.

A DRAMATIC POEM,

IN FIVE ACTS.

TO ALL WHO ADMIRE THE ANCIENT CHARACTER OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR.

VIVAT REGINA.

LONDON:
PARTRIDGE AND OAKEY, PATERNOSTER ROW,
AND 70, EDGWARE ROAD (HANBURY AND CO. AGENTS),
HERBERT, CHURTON ST., BELGRAVE ROAD, PIMLICO.
1851.

280. g. 110.

THE Subject of the following Poem occurred at Shushan, in Persia, about Five Hundred Years before the Christian Era.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

MORDECAI,	*A Jew.*
AHASUERUS,	*King of Persia.*
ESTHER,	*Queen of Persia.*
HAMAN,	*A Prince.*
MEMUCAN,	*A Prince.*
ZELZA,	*Maid to Esther.*
ZERESH,	*Wife of Haman.*
SEPHAR	*A Physician.*
ARIOCH,	*Officer in the Army.*
SHALAMAN, HATACH, HABBONA,	*Chamberlains.*
BUTLER,	
HOUSEKEEPER,	
SERVANTS,	
SOLDIERS,	
JEWS,	
CHORUS.	

London: C. Herbert, Churton Street, Pimlico.

MORDECAI:

OR,

The Jew Exalted.

ERRATA.

Page 35, line 5, *dele* "Cast off."

Page 70, line 9, *for* "They welcome her with," &c., *read* "They welcome her approach with," &c.

Page 104, line 1, *insert* "*Esther*" at commencement.

And I am glad they're gone, for feasting time,
When men of ardent minds and equal rank
Are brought into collision, is the time
When mischief forms i' th' egg: suspicion, then,
And jealousy, mistakes and unmeant words,
Like undeveloped spawn of reptiles, lie
Within the memory growing, till some chance
Wake up and animate the dormant vice
To quarrels, feuds, and blood-desiring rage.
So far, in peace, the days have passed away;

But, I have been exalted by the King
To glory second only to himself;
And this must, of necessity, excite
The envy of some few; — e'en now, I see
A colder meaning in Memucan's eye;
He was chief lord; but now the chief am I;
He was, I said, — the other princes were;
But he and they have had their day at court.
These sunflowers, veering round the royal light,
Have ripened into seed, and fallen off;
While King Ahasuerus, deeply hid
Within the ruddy home of youthful love,
Shrinks from all application in the state,
And yields the government to other hands :—
And I, as if by heaven ordain'd to be
A rival sphere of brilliancy and power,
Dazzle the sight of universal man :
I fix the eyes of multitudes at once.
I lift my hand, — they stoop, they kneel, they fall :
And young aspirants for a place at court
With most attentive service wait on me,
Deeming their honour most secure when I
Appoint them to their duties in the state.
Surely I hold an enviable place;
And envied I must be, as thus I rise.
My earnest care shall, therefore, be to hold,
In close affinity to my own will,

The princely youths, who move by my consent.
These youths are mine, instinctively are mine ;
The multitude are mine ; the soldiers mine ;
And, if I will, — the kingdom, too, is mine.
I see my likeness in the morning sun :
Here, do I rise ; my noon is Macedon ;
Thence, onward, I shall travel to the West,
And take a conquering circuit of the earth
Till all the world make me a deity !

Enter ZERESH.

Zeresh. I was attracted by two sounds at once, —
Approaching music, and my husband's voice.

Haman. If both are music, we are all in tune !
Listen awhile ! why come the fellows here ?

Enter MUSICIANS *with* CHORUS.

Chorus. Lord Haman, hail !
To Haman bow the knee !
Accept our praise !
The pride of Persia !
Greatest of men !
How pleasant is his name !

Haman. My friends, your voices mingle in my praise :
My greatness is, your joy at seeing me.

Chorus. Let Haman speak, and, at his word, the sun
Of Persia's glory shall more brightly shine!
Greatest of men!
The pride of Persia!
Let every child in Persia know that name.
Most honourable name!
Accept our praise!
To Haman bow the knee!
Lord Haman, hail!

Exeunt MUSICIANS, &c.

Haman. Such sounds call up a secret pleasure here;
For, though my place is nearest to the throne —
Although I am admired by the Queen —
Though I am envied by the men of state —
Though Persia's princes stoop unto the ground,
And hold themselves as nothing in my sight —
Though colleges, assemblies, cities, halls,
Receive me, with loud greetings, at their gates,
I feel some thanks to these poor ignorants,
Who have no other motive, than to do
Just as their betters do in every thing.
There's nothing in their words; mere common breath,
Puffed rudely through their vulgar shapeless mouths,
Agape, as time may serve, to curse or praise.
Their praise is nought; and, yet their praise I like,
There being a lust for flattery in the soul,

Which seeks for universal compliment, —
A power as full as man, himself, is full.
This makes a little man vain of his words ;
This makes a plain-faced maiden vain of looks :
By this, our gay young fellows exercise
Their studied graces for the next display ;
And greatest men will pride themselves on this,
To have the common, vulgar, unmeant praise, —
The only homage of the poorest men.
From these, the lowest, through the various grades
Of men, of all conditions, I receive
Obeisance they would show to none but me.
Five times, without uncovering, I stood
Within the royal presence ; that, no man,
But Haman, ever dared to do before ;
And, then, I was most graciously received
With a majestic curtsey by the Queen.
So have I gained the heart of this great realm
To suit my purpose, whensoe'er I will, —
Save one, save one, — I had forgotten him, —
This Mordecai, — knave, upstart, blockhead, *Jew!*
Woe to the fellow ! if he still persist
I'll break the sinew in his iron neck.

Enter MORDECAI.

Mordecai. What most offensive flattery I heard —
" Command, lord Haman, and the sun shall shine ! "

O, most abominable ! my heart grieves
To hear one man address another so.
Whether is worse, he who such flattery gives,
Or he who takes it with a ready smile ?
" Command, Lord Haman, and the sun will shine ! "
If I mistake not, Haman's sun will set
In rapid darkness, while he thinks it noon.

Haman. Intolerable wretch ! I vastly scorn
To offer you resentment, lest some cur
Of your most mongrel and aborted race
Should show the training he received of you
By snarling at his betters, as you do.

Mordecai. My lord, I snarled not ; I merely spoke
Such counsel as my conscience forced me to.

Haman. Your conscience, fellow ! by my surest fate
This I predict, that all the snarling curs
To which I have referred, shall hang like dogs,
And you, amongst the number, head and chief !

Mordecai. I cannot bow my head to such as you.
Exit MORDECAI.

Haman. What am I, after all, and what have been
These two years, since the King has honoured me?

An ignoramus, buoyed up on the wings
Of sudden and deceitful destiny:
And just as I am mounting to that sphere
Where men in starry lustre write their names,
The power on which I rise withdraws himself,
And casts his favourite, headlong, to the ground.
Oh! have I not been foolish thus to hope
In a chimerical and vain pursuit?

Zeresh. Yes.

Haman. And you say "Yes!" Is that your cold assent
To my intolerable misery?

Zeresh. Yes!

Haman. What mean you, Zeresh?

Zeresh. I indulge a laugh
At your absurdity. O, Haman, think
Of Persia's second greatness speaking thus!
What do you see in that Jew, Mordecai,
To cause a vexing feeling in your breast?
His name is bad enough; hang him at once.
Erect a gallows here within the court,
A hundred feet in height, that all may see
The end that every rebel Jew shall meet.

Haman. Rightly advanced, most reasonable wife !
I'm glad to have such counsel ; and I go
To give the eager hangman work to do.

Exeunt HAMAN *and* WIFE.

SCENE II. — *A Garden.*

ESTHER, *walking alone.*

All things are beautiful, all things are good :
And in th' arrangement of this lovely place
Art seems with nature to have rivalled well.

Enter AHASUERUS.

Ahas. Walking alone ? My desultory feet
Have kept me absent from you for an hour.
Do you enjoy this walking out alone ?

Esther. There is in solitude a soothing charm,
Which lulls excitement, and diverts the mind
From many devious ways to some good path. (*Sighs.*)

Ahas. On whose account is it you heave that sigh ?

Esth. I did not notice that a sigh escaped ;
I sigh for none, for nothing, but myself.

Ahas. And why yourself? Are you not Persia's Queen?
And if one thing there be within this realm
Which could prevent that sigh, it is for you.
I glory in complete prosperity:
I cannot see a reason for regret.

Esther. Our God, it is, who pities you, and gives
This vast magnificence into your hand.

Ahas. What need have I of pity? Pities me!
Pity is kept for miserable men,
And not for those who live in regal power.

Esther. Religion, in the land from which I came,
Instructs us, first, that man has need of help
In every thing he does; nay, every breath
He draws but by a momentary leave
Of God his Maker.

Ahas. I can well conceive
How men, of your religion, would so teach.
You oft have told me of those mighty men,
Who crossed the ocean-bed as on dry ground;
And at their shout a mighty city fell;
Of one, whose single arm a thousand slew: —
And other such, impossible like, feats,

That fable, in her wildest wandering mood,
Ne'er thought of finding out.

Esther. Such men died
To leave a more degenerate race behind;
Who, having not attained unto the might
Of their great ancestors, became extinct
Among the nations: — now, they only live
In records of past days.

Ahas. So, Oracles,
To elevate the mind of fallen men,
Compare their abject state and nothingness
Unto the glory of their pristine race.
Therefore, 'tis wise, that your religious men
Should tell the people of their humbled state.
Again, you sigh! what makes my Queen thus sigh?

Esther. The name you give me, is the cause, my lord.

Ahas. What name? the Queen? what cause can you find there?

Esther. To be a wife is new: — to be a Queen
Is also new, to me: — there is my fear.

Ahas. Why should you fear to be your husband's wife?

Esther. It seems a most tremendous thing to be,
To one so great as he, — both Wife and Queen.

Ahas. The first must be the object of my choice ;
The second is the ordinance of Heaven.
The various duties of a wife are light,
If my requirements daily make them so ;
And she who holds the station of a Queen,
Shall be assisted by a higher power.
Esther, does your religion teach you this ?

Esther. My lord, such is the doctrine that I hold.
If I could see, in me, that power to do, —
If I could think my duties were fulfilled.

Ahas. Make matters not too difficult, my love.
There is, in man, a principle to be,
To do, to suffer, to accomplish all
The purpose of appointed destiny ;
And circumstantial matters are the signs
By which we judge what we are next to do.
The power we have to-day will be enlarged,
For larger things, to-morrow. Hear a tale : —
"I once was fearfully pursued by foes ;—
My titles and my wealth made me a prize :
And, finding that the men with whom I stayed
Were open to a bribe, my course was plain ; —

My only chance was in a rapid flight.
So, half my purse I offered for a horse,
And soon obtained the object of my want.
Fresh from the stall a Syrian steed was led,
Vigorous, and light, and eager to be gone.
As I beheld him gratefully, I said,
'I never tried thy action yet, my steed,
But to thy mettle I entrust my life.'
I quickly mounted, and away we went;
And, rapidly, as when a curtain falls,
The city sank in night's obscurity.
Swift, as the wind, pursuers came behind;
But I, more swift than they, continued on: —
All night, with slight abatement of his speed,
As if one will possessed us, o'er wild rocks
And sandy waste, through streams and forest deep,
The horse, by instinct, sought his home and mine.
And, when the sun had wakened man to work,
I found myself surrounded by my friends."
See you the moral, Esther, of my tale?

Esther. I do, my lord. Your life has been preserved,
To sway a kindly sceptre o'er mankind.

Ahas. Oh, no! the meaning is not there, fair queen;
But, in the horse himself, the riddle is.

Esther. Why, then, you owe to him a debt of thanks,

Which has been daily paid, by extra care ;
And that good steed is now the royal horse.

Ahas. Wide of the mark ! can you not yet discern
The application of so plain a theme ?

Esther. You have so wakened up my fancy's wing,
That, in your venturous course and rapid flight,
From end to end, I've darted to and fro, —
And yet I cannot fix on any spot
Which echoes out the meaning of your tale.

Ahas. Come, then, we 'll try another, still more plain.
Regard that tree of pendent lily flowers
And sombre leaves ; — that favourite tree of yours,
Where, first, I saw you gazing heavenward, love,
As marble fixed, a scarcely breathing form,
Your thoughts ascending on devotion's flame : —
That lovely tree I took, when but a twig,
Without one leaf, yet having promise-buds ;
And, at my own request, 't was planted there.
I knew 't would grow, for life was in itself.
See you my meaning now ?

Esther. I think I do.
You placed the tree, that you might see therein
An emblem of your majesty's increase.

Ahas. Almost the meaning, Esther, all but guessed.
Oh ! had you used another name for mine
The secret were disclosed. Yet, stay awhile : —
That lamp, which stands upon the pillar, there,
Is trimmed for use ; and will it therefore burn ?

Esther. Of course ; effects will always follow cause.

Ahas. Of course ; effects will always follow cause.
You are the cause, my Esther, you the effect.
So surely as I trusted in my horse, —
So surely as the tree brought forth its flowers, —
So surely as the lamp will yield its light, —
So surely as effects will follow cause, —
Will lovely Esther prove herself a Queen.

Esther. Ah ! there, my lord, you make me sigh again.
I am a fallen being, out of course :
Not, as Eve was created, is your wife !
The horse, in fire and instinct, has not failed ; —
The tree, as when at first, by God's command,
The fruitful earth put forth the hidden life,
And filled fair Eden with a rich perfume
From full-developed trees and brilliant flowers ;—
The lamp will give her silvery flame of light,
And bless the palace with a lengthened day :—
But, I am dark, groping in nature's night,

Not led by certain instinct, as the brute,
But urged and checked by a deceitful heart.
Now, all those heaven-sprung virtues, graces, airs,
Which veiled the virgin purity of Eve,
And stamped her glorious from her Maker's hand,
Are dead in woman, ruffled in the bud.
Eve was an angel, and, —

Ahas. You her very child.
Oh, Esther! do not dwell upon your faults:
Your presence lowers me in dignity.
I gaze not on an angel, but a woman;
And when that woman speaks of innate sin,
I blush to recollect my thoughtless days.
If angel purity and grace were yours
(Of whose perfectness I have heard you speak),
You could not be my wife for one short hour;
A guilty serpent, I should shrink from you;
And you, ungratified, would fly from me.
But let me, more at length, my riddle show.
I've heard and seen you more than you're aware:
My observation, joined to caution deep,
Has taken measure of your character,
And given passion counsel, for your sake: —
And, if there be a woman in the earth
Whom I might choose, in judgment, or in love,
You are the object of my happy choice.

Vashti, my former queen, was not my choice;
I sought her not; but with my crown she came.

Esther. Your words are most enlivening to my soul.

Ahas, Ah! from that sentence I will draw a theme;
So, let us turn to Nature's book again,
And look for further illustration there.

Exeunt.

SCENE III. — *Room in Mordecai's House.*

MORDECAI *sitting.* *Enter* MEMUCAN.

Mem. I am not come to mock you, Mordecai,
As some men do when they approach a Jew:
I came to offer counsel; for, I see,
You are pursuing, fast, a dangerous course.

Mord. Counsel is wholesome, from whatever source
The wisdom doth proceed, provided that
The end to be obtained is lawful gain.

Mem. If to preserve you from destruction be
A lawful gain, my counsel must be good.

Mord. Noble Memucan, I have often thought

That you had principles within your soul
More than the actions of your life display :
And it is good to see a prince, like you,
Step on one side to make a Jew beware,
It is a proof of your benevolence, —
That principle which makes a man like God.
Yet, — is it good, to see a man, like you,
Kneel to a stone, and seek for wisdom there ?

Mem. I kneel from duty, Mordecai : and, then,
I think, I act a wiser part than you.
The reason of my coming here, to-day,
Is to complain that you refuse to kneel
When Haman passes you.

Mord. I never shall.

Mem. The king hath given commandment that you shall :
And, if it come before his clemency
That you refuse to pay what Persia pays,
I question if you make a clear escape.

Mord. Were it a simple act of courtesy
I would comply ; but Haman seeks for more :
He makes himself a god, accepting praise,
Which none but God can claim, who governs all :

For when the numerous royal days come round,
The trumpets shake the air with Haman's praise,
The damsels strike their timbrels as they dance,
And sing of Haman's deeds in words like these: —
"'Twas Haman made the earth, and sun, and moon;
His smile calls forth the flowers, the herb, the fruit;
His hand controls the sea; and, at his call,
The winds in tempests roar, or calmly blow:"
Such vile extravagance I've heard them sing
With hand upon their breast, and eyes on ground;
And must I join with them, and say, Amen?
I never will — I worship GOD alone.

Mem. But, need you worship, if you only bow?
I see no cause to worship him at all.
Like a wise courtier, he has gained the king,
To estimate him higher than us all.

Mord. His course is that of an unbridled horse, —
Striking, and bold, and rapid in his pace,
But moved by an ambitious fiery soul;
His will, uncurbed by prudence or by force,
May lead him through some unknown dangerous road,
Till he leap headlong down a precipice,
And miserably perish at the last.

Mem. His way has prospered more than mine, and so
I take the second place, and he the first.

Mord. Nothing is harder in philosophy
Than this, — the knowledge of the principles
Which influence the deeds of other men ;
My own internal gravity I know,
And can, to something like a certainty,
Decide unto how great or small degree
My bias is to evil or to good.
But, would I judge by what I see in man,
I must consider well the circumstance
By which he acts ; and I must also look
Unto the end to which his actions tend,
Before I may presume to understand
The merit of his life and character :
Thus we, in charity, are bound to judge.
But there are some, amidst their fellow men,
Whose spirit doth so plainly paint their deeds,
That observation may at once decide ;
And this, Memucan must in Haman see.

Mem. I see the paint you speak of, Mordecai ;
But by a magic stretch of loyalty,
I look the tinsel into finest gold : —
I say, a gilded representative
Of King Ahasuerus ! — thus I judge ;
And, when I bow my head, I serve my king.

Mord. There is one principle, in which our views
Must differ, till our views have one become :

I mean, religion, — a most subtle sense
Of right and wrong, — implanted in the heart,
Instructed by the doctrine which we learn :
I, for myself, profess to have a law
Superior to the King's ; by that I'm bound,
By texts of purest tendency, to watch
The secret working of my faculties,
Lest I should join a multitude of men,
And worship second causes for the first.
I do not keep your conscience ; if you think
It right to bow, and so to serve your King,
Do such obeisance, as you judge most meet ;
I cannot worship man ; — my GOD I will.

Mem. Well, then, good Mordecai, you're not convinced.

Mord. Convinced I am, Memucan, and I stand
Upon this firm conviction, that it's wrong
To bow my head to him, who covets praise.
But, Lord Memucan, mark what I have said,
I mean, as touching idols, and such things.
Behold this vase appropriately placed
For th' illustration of my sentiment : —
It has a body, and see here a neck ;
Here are a pair of ears, and, here, a mouth ;
And, strange to say, it also stands on feet.

Well, must I hug it to my breast, and say,—
"Pitcher! thou art my god; thou hearest me!"
No, miserable potsherd, lie thou there!—
(*Dashes the vase to the ground.*)
So perish deities contrived by man!

Mem. Farewell, my father, fare you well to-day.

Mord. To-day, and every day, Memucan, fare you well.

Exit MEMUCAN.

SCENE IV.—*A Room in the Palace.*

AHASUERUS, HAMAN.

Ham. Great King of Persia! if I only walk
A hundred yards from home, I meet with some
Either bewailing in a whining cant
About their Babylonish bondage here,
Or, singing mischief in a foreign key.

Ahas. But do you think these Jews should be destroyed?

Ham. There is, for us, but one alternative:
If they remain we must agree to die.

Ahas. What ! is it so far settled for us then ?

Ham. In every city, village, neighbourhood,
Throughout the whole of Persia, where men dwell,
These undermining miscreants may be found,
Like pismires, leagued in one community,
To build, for their own purpose, hills of strength,
From out the ruins they design to make.

Ahas. Have you obtained this information long ?

Ham. By most unwearied and excessive care,
I certified myself of many facts,
Before I could believe the things I say ;
But now, my pains have found a full reward
In crowded information from all sides ;
And I do earnestly entreat my lord
(Having vehement longing for the peace
And safety, wealth and honour, of this realm,)
To bring the matter to a speedy end.

Ahas. Doth it not seem a sort of butchery
To slay a quiet people in cold blood ?

Ham. Quiet, my lord ! their craft is quietness.
Meet traitors in their treachery, I say.
They spread themselves throughout our peaceful land,

That on a certain day, already fixed,
They may, as one man, rise and put us down;
And I would take them, in their own device,
And, in one day, of our appointing too,
Fulfil their own iniquity on them,
By causing every rebel Jew to die.
And as our time is short, I offer, here,
A document, made ready in your name.

Ahas. Read me the purport, ere we fix the seal.

Exeunt.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE — *A Garden, with Ruins.*

ESTHER, MORDECAI.

Esther. How sweetly doth the early morning breeze
Its fragrance carry o'er a gladdened world.

Mord. This is the time, when Nature wakes to work.
The quickening energy of dawning light
Its mild excitement pours into all eyes;

Responsive to the touch, the voice of life,
In grateful utterance, every where is heard,
From merry birds and beasts in search of food;
Not first, yet, joining in the varied throng,
Man to his duty cheerfully returns; —
Labour forgets the toil of yesterday; —
Ill-nature wakes unto a better mind,
Making a feeble purpose to amend;
And care, with jovial dreams, has left his case.

Esther. Not many cares have I, good Mordecai;
But every day its special duty brings,
Requiring proper counsel for itself;
So, finding my supply of texts run short,
I came to fill my pitcher at your well.

Mord. I would advise you, Esther, often, here,
To walk amid the ruined monuments;
That in the contemplation of these stones,
Which, in their silence, are most eloquent,
You might a truthful illustration draw
Of the past glory of your fathers' house,
From which, by Heaven's strange interposing Hand,
You have been elevated to a throne,
The highest now on earth: — this I advise,
Lest you, in circumstances so opposed
Unto your first condition, should forget

Your bygone days of former nothingness,
And, mingling with the flattery of the Court,
Imbibe the force of other principles,
And lose the grace I now behold in you.

Esther. Oh! Mordecai! I do not love the Court.

Mord. We soon accommodate ourselves to things
The most opposed to nature and to taste:
And, though my confidence in you is full,
That your fair virtue suffer no decay,—
That there be no regrets in after life,
Keep always in your mind your first estate;—
(A principle which, trained within your soul,
Has given a language to your faculties;)—
Lest other untried principles come in
To rob your spirit of her dearest peace,
And make your retrospect of life a pain:—
As one, who, having wandered far from home,
Revisits once again the early place
Of discipline, where boyhood first conceived
The thoughts and feelings of the after-man,
In solemn thought is cast, reflecting much
On mis-spent days and disappointed hopes,
He feels a painful, though unuttered, wish
To run the journey of his life again.
Bnt, perhaps, my talk is tedious?

Esth. Oh, no !
I greatly love such sentiments as these.

Mord. I fear that diadem upon your brow :
Lest it should spoil the sweet simplicity
Which has been fondly cherished in your mind.

Esth. I do not fear, myself, on that account ;
I only wear it as in duty bound :
And, when I am alone, I lay it down,
As a most cumbrous burden, from my head.

Mord. Bear with me, daughter, while I speak again.
Though you are vastly raised to be a Queen,
You may, as suddenly, descend again :
Remember her who filled your place before,
And, in young Vashti's case, regard your own.

Esther. I have no fear of being sent away,
Because Ahasuerus loves me as his wife.

Mord. Well, well, I would not mar your happiness
By unkind sentiments, or idle doubts ;
But when I look upon you, wedded thus
Unto a heathen king, our law sounds harsh,
Which strictly interdicts such marriages :
But, here, we have no law, our will being bound ;

For, in th' administration of a law,
The freedom of the will is presupposed, —
The power to obey or disregard the law, —
If we be over-ruled, the law is void.
And this, I take it, is the bitter curse
Of our captivity, having the will
To serve our Maker and uphold His Name,
And yet being hindered in our serving Him.

Esth. And, therefore, must I seek your counsel more;
And, in this secret manner, steal away,
To take my hasty lessons here and there.

Mord. I dared not think, when you became the Queen,
That you would ever see my face again.

Esther. It would have been a most afflictive thing,
Had I been kept from this, my oldest joy.

Mord. We have been kindly kept from much we feared,
And more has been allowed us than we hoped.

Esther. Well, then, my father, I shall come again;
Having no priest, on whom can I depend
For daily counsel, as each day returns,

If not on you, my father and my guide ?
I learn dependence from wide Nature's book.
Oft have I seen a tiny climbing plant,
Which would have rotted in the tangled grass,
Had not a friendly tree supported it :
So, Mordecai, have you befriended me,
And made me equal to the state I hold.

Mord. And, like your little parasite, you grew,
Until you reached another neighbouring tree,
More stately than myself, facing the sun,
And, then, you left me, that your pendent flowers
Might grace the Court and beautify the world.

Esther. Nay, Mordecai, I have not left you yet :
If I do bloom upon another tree,
With you I'm root-bound, woven with your growth ;
And this poor tendril that now holds your arm,
Grew, without forethought, like your parasite,
And grasped another, dearer than itself,—
Instinctively obeying innate life :
And have I stretched beyond my nature's bound?

Mord. No, daughter, no ; 'tis sweet to hear you talk ;
For, in your heavenly-tutored mind, I see
My labour well rewarded ; you do speak
Unlike all women, save yourself, — a Queen ;

Keep well this true philosophy in view,
And from the page of nature daily read :—
There is perfection ; there the smallest work
Is, so amazingly, in its own place,
That it meets circumstances, and they it
With most unquestionable aptitude;—
And to a mind well furnished from that book
Of nature, add the better light of truth
Revealed to prophets by th' Almighty Word :
There, is the wisdom and the strength of thrones,
Which, every eye of observation sees,
In glancing o'er the history of the world.
If this great kingdom should not be destroyed
This is the cause, — "the Throne hath feared the LORD."
And for this purpose I do often think
You are exalted to imperial rank,
That you might show those wondrous acts of old
By which God made the nations fear his Name.

Esther. Oh ! Mordecai, do you conceive that I
Have any power to make those wonders known ?

Mord. All power belongs to God : the weakest things,
Sometimes, it pleases him to occupy
For his own will and pleasure ; so, to bring
Into contempt the pride of wilful man.

That, which is most despised, is oft most strong;
And things of seeming insignificance
Are causes to most wonderful effects: —
Therefore my thoughts refresh me as they rise.

Esth. And I perceive an opening path for me.

Mord. Which may Heaven grant to lead to happiness!
I hope, one day, to find more liberty
In exercising our religious creed,
Than — what we now must call a privilege, —
To meditate and talk amid the stones
And dark retreats of this sequestered place.

Esther. It may be long ere we shall meet again.

Mord. It may be sooner than we now expect.
But seek for Heaven's guidance. Fare you well.

Exeunt.

SCENE II. — *A Gate at the Palace.*

MEMUCAN, SHALAMAN.

Mem. We shall not meet with Mordecai to-day.

Shal. I thought to have found him seated at the gate,
It being his daily custom to wait here,

To give direction to the traveller,
Who comes for the first time within these walls:
Here, people bring their cause of difference,
And by his counsel make a settlement.
He has so vast a fund of useful truth
Within his memory stored, that you shall meet,
Amongst the humbler people of the land
When talking of their little course of things,
With numerous instances in which his words,
Have been the means of helping on their case.

Mem. I think this morning will unfold the cause
Of absence from his long accustomed post.
We live in fearful times, good Shalaman.

Shal. I see your face has ta'en a serious cast;
But I am ignorant of any cause,
In which our friend, the Jew, is much concerned.

Mem. Have you not heard, then, of this day's decree?

Shal. Of nothing, really! nothing in the world.

Mem. That is remarkable; but you will know
When Haman shall have sealed his documents.

Shal. It humbles me to know the thing so late:

Ahas. What ! is it so far settled for us then ?

Ham. In every city, village, neighbourhood,
Throughout the whole of Persia, where men dwell,
These undermining miscreants may be found,
Like pismires, leagued in one community,
To build, for their own purpose, hills of strength,
From out the ruins they design to make.

Ahas. Have you obtained this information long ?

Ham. By most unwearied and excessive care,
I certified myself of many facts,
Before I could believe the things I say ;
But now, my pains have found a full reward
In crowded information from all sides ;
And I do earnestly entreat my lord
(Having vehement longing for the peace
And safety, wealth and honour, of this realm,)
To bring the matter to a speedy end.

Ahas. Doth it not seem a sort of butchery
To slay a quiet people in cold blood ?

Ham. Quiet, my lord ! their craft is quietness.
Meet traitors in their treachery, I say.
They spread themselves throughout our peaceful land,

That on a certain day, already fixed,
They may, as one man, rise and put us down;
And I would take them, in their own device,
And, in one day, of our appointing too,
Fulfil their own iniquity on them,
By causing every rebel Jew to die.
And as our time is short, I offer, here,
A document, made ready in your name.

Ahas. Read me the purport, ere we fix the seal.

Exeunt.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE — *A Garden, with Ruins.*

ESTHER, MORDECAI.

Esther. How sweetly doth the early morning breeze
Its fragrance carry o'er a gladdened world.

Mord. This is the time, when Nature wakes to work.
The quickening energy of dawning light
Its mild excitement pours into all eyes;

As you have done, and we are also clear
In our own consciences in what we did.

Mord. Expediency clear you ! no, no, no !
Expediency is the law of self,
And self, of all deceivers, is the worst.
To some men's minds, it is expedient
To do an evil thing that good may come :
Such men despise all feeling, save their own,
And would have all the world their will obey :
Such men would trample down a thousand lives
To save some pigmy favourite from a fall,
Or raise themselves in wealth, or pomp, or power :
And, as unto the stretch of human will
There is no bound, except where God decrees,
The men who practise it would go as far
As circumstance will find an inch of room ;
And, were it possible, to serve an end,
Whereby their own estate might be advanced,
Would dare to overthrow the world itself.
Oh ! my dear friends, say not that word again !
I dread the working of such principles
As those to which I now allude : — beware,
Lest, in a moment of unguardedness,
A mind, affected by expediency,
Should give consent to some alluring snare,
And miserably sink in changeless woe !

I shall not die ! I feel assured of that :—
The law is my defence ; on that I rest.
When was a Jew forsaken of his God ? —
Cast off ! — Never, when he obeyed the written word.
Now is my soul in expectation strong : —
Despair no more ! deliverance is at hand !

Reuben. Would that my faith were vigorous as yours ;
But Israel's sun is setting : now, black night
Her unknown instrument of death prepares,
To overwhelm us in one common fall.

Mord. Before our sun shall set, some Joshua
Shall rise and bid the day stand still, till men
Have, wondering at the wonder, speechless grown,
And, blessing our behest, forgot their rage.
Imperial beauty ! — loved Jerusalem !
My longing heart is faint because of thee.
In thy wide wilderness, or hidden groves,
Or by the streams, or in thy caverned rocks,
Dwells there a prophet, known to God alone ?
Him send to us, as when Elijah came,
From three years' absence, straight to Ahab's face,
Meeting the anger of a reckless king,
And called down rain upon the arid land.
Or else, perchance, within these very walls,
There lives a spirit not yet manifest : —
As when, starved down to famished skeletons,

The men of Israel stared like idiot babes,
Craving the offal of their pigeon-cotes,
And women, urged by hunger, lost the sense
Of their maternal love, and cruelly
Devoured their children's flesh, as nature's food,—
The calm Elisha, dreading further woe,
Promised, in one day more, to fill them all
With rich supplies of cattle, food, and wealth.
In Esther I have hope: women, before,
As Rahab, Jael, Deborah, and such like,
Have rallied hope, and made deliverance sure.

All. God's mighty Hand protect our gracious Queen!

Reuben. Bear to her goodness much regard from us,
And strong entreaty that her earnest care
Might be directed to our desperate state.

Mord. Reuben, our case is not yet desperate:
As morning follows night, this heavy day
Shall bear us to a morrow full of light.
Now, let us cheer our hearts before we part.

SONG.

All. When heavy thoughts oppress my soul,
And, billow-like, within me roll,
I look towards a distant shore,
Where fearful thoughts shall be no more.

While unseen hopes possess my breast,
In brighter days to come I rest ;
These threatening clouds shall pass away,
And present night be future day.

Exeunt.

SCENE IV. — *A Room in the Palace.*

ESTHER and ZELZA. — HATACH *waiting.*

Esther. Come, Zelza ! is your voice grown harsh to-day ?
You neither sing nor speak in melody.
My soul requires some cheering ; for 't is strange,
With all things even, and my mind content,
A melancholy feeling reigns within, —
Some strange presentiment of coming ill.

Zelza. I neither like forbodings, nor regrets,
They being caused by weakness, or by sin,
And melancholy is th' effect of both.

Esther. What is the meaning of presentiment ?
I have so strange a sense of brooding ill,
That all my members move as out of joint ;
Nor can my will the feeling overcome.
I do remember, when a little girl,

That, sometimes, sporting on a sunny day,
When all around there seemed a settled joy,
A sudden dulness wrapped me as a mist;
And then, some hours after, nature changed
Her features to a sadness deep as mine,
Which deeper grew, till, in a thunder storm,
She hurried me to shelter, there to learn
The meaning of my own presentiment.

Zelza. It was instinctive, lady, as the birds
Cackle and chirp before th' approaching storm.
There is, within our souls, a secret sense
Which vapour acts upon, our life being air;
This sense being joined unto our mental parts
We form conceptions, as we see or hear
The various sounds and forms of things around;
And, as our faculties are bound in one
By a strong living sympathy within,
We are, I think, affected more or less
By every change of circumstance we meet.

Esther. Then let us have a change of sound at once:
Come, take your harp, and cheer your heart and mine.

Zelza. If I should sing, 't would be a funeral dirge.

Esther. Are you, then, melancholy?

Zelza. Yes, great cause
Have I to be depressed, forefearing much

Esther. Perhaps you have lost a friend?

Zelza. No, but I may.

Esther. Who is afflicted then?

Zelza. At present, none.

Esther. Why you are worse than I, foreboding more.

Zelza. Yes, I have ample reason, knowing more.

Esther. Oh! tell me what has happened, or what may?

Zelza. Will you forgive me, lady, if I crave
Of you a promise never to reveal
The name of her by whom you are informed.
I am thus cautious, for I speak of one
Who stands acquitted ere he may be judged,
So elevated his position is.

Esther. The King?

Zelza. No, lady, no: I scarcely dare.

Esther. Not trust me, Zelza ?

Zelza. Yes, I feel I may.
Lord Haman is the man through whom we grieve :
He has obtained an edict from the King,
To slay the Jewish people, every where.

Esther. And do you really fear what you have heard ?

Zelza. I am a maid of Judah !

Esther. Am not I ?

Zelza. But you are guarded by a throne of power.

Esther. Nay, is it certain, or but vain surmise ?

Zelza. Our venerable father, Mordecai,
Is sitting at the gate, o'erwhelmed with grief,
With garments rent, and ashes on his head,
And covered with vile sackcloth ; through the streets,
Like an unsettled ghost, he flitted by,
Heaving deep sighs, as if to smother grief,
Till, now and then, his inward pangs burst forth
In loud and bitter utterance.

Esther (*to Hatach*). Hatach, here !
Are you aware of any dreadful news ?

Hatach. I doubt not, Lady Esther, I know all:
Our conversation has one theme to-day, —
The people whom I love are doomed to die.

Esther. By whose decree have they been doomed to die?

Hatach. What is decreed, in Persia, is decreed;
By whom, we dare not ask, or say, or think;
Edicts and laws are passed, and then plain facts
Declare what edicts and what laws they are.
In every Jewish house, lamenting tones
And sudden bursts of grief and solemn psalms
Anticipate the certainty of death.

Esther. Hatach, step forth to Mordecai, at once,
And say the Queen has bid you come to him,
As head of all the Jews, to know the truth, —
What is the nature of this dread decree,
And on whose sad account it has been made?

Exit HATACH.

Now Zelza let us for a while indulge
Our melancholy, in your funeral dirge:
The words may sadden sorrow; yet perchance,
Some fitful note shall mingle with a chord,
Deep in our bosom hid, which, being struck,
Shall elevate our minds to higher themes.

SONG BY ZELZA

When sinks the soul beneath a load of care,
A sure relief may be obtained by prayer ;
That makes the burden light:
Though veiled from our sight,
A gracious Providence inclines His ear,
And mitigates the danger that we fear.

Esther. I feel my spirit lightened while you sing.

Zelza. Your condescension greatly honours me.

Esther. And I shall gladly hear it o'er again.

Zelza. A few there may be found in every land,
Who wisely own the overruling hand,
In time of trial fierce,—
When agony and tears,
And deep forebodings ravish every breast,—
These, in the midst of turmoil, shall have rest.

Esther. The sentiments, dear Zelza, are most true,
And are most properly in harmony
With our presentiments and rising fears.
Re-enter HATACH.
Well, Hatach, with what trouble are you come ?

Hatach. I met with Mordecai at the King's gate,
Apparently composed, but still in grief,
And more affected when I named your name.
He had been weeping largely, for his eyes
Were red and swollen, and his head was low;
And in a most subdued and under tone
Mellowed with serious affability
He freely entered into colloquy.
He told me of the horrible decree
Which was declared to-day at break of morn,
And sent by posts unto the kingdom's bound
Then, in sad confirmation of his words,
This document he bid me bring to you:
The edict by Lord Haman was devised,
And sealed in King Ahasuerus' name; —
That, on a certain day, and speedily,
And, at the hour named in the decree,
The military force should draw the sword,
And slaughter every Jew without reserve.

Esther. Merciful Heaven! I must see Mordecai!
Zelza, your arm! and Hatach come with me.

Exeunt.

SCENE V. — *Night.*
Servant's Hall in the Palace of Shushan.

Enter 1*st Servant, meeting another.*

1*st Serv.* I want another light ; he cannot sleep.

2*nd. Serv.* The King ?

1*st Serv.* He says there's something going wrong.—
He looked to Heaven, and spoke in serious tones.

2*nd. Serv.* But what has happened to him ?

Enter HABBONA.

Habb. Bring those lights !
I want a constable, an officer.

2*nd Serv.* Sir, I was told ——

Habb. Told what ?

2*nd. Serv.* The King is ill.

Habb. Peace, fool ! a council must be called at once.
I want an officer ! — where's Shalaman ?
Go to the Record Room : — fetch Shalaman !
You know your business. *Exit* 2*nd Serv.*

1*st. Serv.* Why, Sir, he 's a bed.

Habb. Go, go, and fetch him here as quick as thought.

Re-enter 2*nd Servant.*

2*nd. Serv.* I see him coming, Sir.

Habb. Well, bring him in.

Enter SHALAMAN, *with Servants.*

Shal. Nay, give me time to breathe ; I'm an old man. I cannot bear much walking, in my sleep.

Habb. Welcome ! your reverence is the man we want To quiet us ; or, rather, quiet some Who need you more.

Shal. What mean you, Habbona ?

Habb. O, you have made some error in your books ; You are to bring the records from the tower : Something has been forgotten in your haste.

Shal. Am I the cause of all this hubbub, then ?

Habb. Perhaps so. In royal minds there hangs a doubt

Of some calamity about to fall :—
A wandering star is coming to the earth
To beat us of course ; or, else, the sun
Is not to rise to-morrow.

Shal. No, no, no :
There 's no such thing on record, certainly.
The King is not in health — his head is sick —
Or else his conscience ——

Habb. Haste, and get the books,
And meet me in the hall ; and, should you hear
Of any thing afloat, mind how you speak. *Exeunt.*

Enter MEMUCAN, *meeting three Servants.*

Mem. Why have you sent for me ? is there a fire ?

1*st Serv.* Great Prince Memucan, there is something wrong
In the King's chamber.

2*nd Serv.* Yes, my lord, he 's dead.

3*rd Serv.* Murdered he is, and Mordecai 's the man :
I saw him creeping at the palace gate.

Mem. Impossible !

Enter 4th Servant.

Mem. What now ? —

4th Serv. The king is dead.

Mem. What, killed ! impossible !

4th Serv. It is too true.

Enter Two Servants.

Mem. Lead on : I'll know the truth. From whence come you ?

5th Serv. The Jews have risen in a multitude,
And killed the King and Queen, and Haman too.

Mem. Where were the guards ?

6th Serv. Slain to a man : —
Old Mordecai was head of the revolt.

Mem. Well, have you taken him? Where are my men?
Give me a horn ! — a trumpet ! — Call a host !

Re-enter SHALAMAN *with books.*

Serv. What say you, Shalaman ?

Shal. Don't stop me now :
My haste has made me angry ! Wrong, indeed !
I never made an error in my life !

Mem. Not one step further, father, till I know
The meaning of this strange disturbance, here ?
Is this a time for books ?

Shal. Of course it is, —
If it delight the King to study them.

Mem. I must go with you; have you seen the King ?

Shal. I'm going to see him now.

Mem. Come, come away !

Exeunt MEMUCAN *and* SHALAMAN.

Enter HOUSEKEEPER

Housek. This is the prophecy of Shalaman :
'Tis well to be a great philosopher,
And see all things before they come to pass,
Or talk at random just to frighten one : —
But I had rather not be kept in dread,
Like this. Hark ! hark ! our fate is coming now !

Serv. Something is coming, by those heavy steps.

Enter SOLDIERS.

Sold. We want refreshment there! who keeps the keys?
Our orders were to march around the wall,
And neither moon nor stars have shown the cause.

Househ. Pray, seat yourselves. Inform us, if you can,
The cause of this strange tumult; every one,
Who ought to be in bed, is broad awake,
And for what purpose not a man can say.

Sold. Well, perhaps a woman can: we nothing know;
But we have heard that some strange mystery
Has been discovered by the King or Queen:
Something, howe'er, there is that needs a watch,
Else we had been in bed an hour ago.

Enter BUTLER.

Here comes the wine! Come, butler, can you tell
The ladies of the kitchen, why we all
Are marched about, against our will, to-night?

Serv. One says the King is mad, — another, dead,—
One says he 's murdered by friend Mordecai, —
Another gives a hint of poisoned wine.

Soldier takes the cup from the Butler.

Sold. Not from this wine, I hope: Was it this wine?

My nose is very sensitive ; I perceive
A double odour rising from this cup :
One is the aromatic of the wine, —
A grateful essence touching up desire ;
The other, I think, is hyssop, or, some root
Of deadly herb, by error, mixed in here.
No, — I'm mistaken ; by this faintish twang,
That tickles in the throat, 'tis what they use
To poison rats, — ratsbane is the name.

Butler. You are a rat for saying so : look here, —
(Drinks.)
I hate all rats ; so, thus I drink this cup,
That, if there be a ratting spirit in me,
I 'll settle him at once.

Sold. By your good leave
I 'll do as you have done, and take a cup,
For I perceive a gnawing 'neath my ribs.

Soldiers. Oh, oh ! we all feel that.

Butler. Well, promise me,
That you will never play the rat again,
By undermining my good name and wine.
Pours out the wine.
Hear me explain the tumult of the night !
The facts are simply these : — The King lay down

And tried to sleep, but tried to sleep in vain;
Which, to his temperate and well-ordered mind,
Appeared so strange a circumstance, that he
Wisely conjectured there must be some cause
For his disquietude; he, therefore, wished
To see the record of th' affairs of state;
That, by a strict appeal to his own acts,
He might, by Heaven's assistance, understand
If he, perchance, had swerved from rectitude.
It was, at first, exciting, to wake up
And hear the noise of day at dead of night;
But, when the cause was known, soon quietness
Resumed her place about the rooms of state,
And blunders and confusions came down here.
All being therefore right, let us to bed. *Exeunt.*

SCENE VI. — *A Bedchamber.*

AHASUERUS *on a Couch*, MEMUCAN, SHALAMAN *with Records.*

Ahas. Read any part that opens, and may Heaven
Have it so ordered, that your eye may fall
On a momentous and important page,
Which shall awake me to a better life,
By showing undone duties, or some fault,

Whereby another is unjustly grieved.
What have you there? Read from that open page.

Shal. (reads). "Treason! the case of Mordecai, the Jew."

Ahas. What Mordecai? what Jew? Is that the case
Of Bigthana and Teres' treachery?—

Shal. The same, great King; and Mordecai the Jew
(Who, let it please my lord, at every time
Is a most loyal subject of this realm),
By deep sagacity and watchful faith,
Made quick discovery of their horrid plot,
Forewarned my lord the king of their intent,
And saved your honorable life and throne.

Ahas. And what reward had Mordecai for this?

Shal. The Seven Princes thanked him;—that was all.

Ahas. If that was all, I have a debt to pay:—
Good for a king, but to a subject nought.
I'm glad I could not sleep: Give thanks to Heaven
For opportunities of doing good!
My mind is lightened of a load of care,
And I shall sleep. Good Shalaman, retire;

And, early in the morning, with you bring
This Mordecai, that I may thank him well,
And do him honour, as his deeds demand.
Most worthy Lord Memucan, I'm concerned
That you have been disturbed on my account.

Mem. To serve the King is always joy to me.
Now, I perceive, there is no further need
Of my attendance.

Ahas. No, Memucan, no:
I was affected by a conscience-storm,
Which, for the present, has been quieted
By the discovery which Shalaman
Has made of our remissness to the Jew.
Perhaps, something may arise, in course of time,
To lead us to a further search of heart.
Retire with Shalaman; and come, betimes,
To see our purpose put into effect.
Good night, Memucan! Shalaman, good night!

Exeunt MEM. *and* SHAL.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I. — *A Room in the Palace.*

AHASUERUS, MEMUCAN, SHALAMAN, MORDECAI.

Ahas. Good Mordecai, I would from your lips, learn
The history of the treason I escaped;
I mean, the plot detected through your help.

Mord. Most noble King, there is a spot of ground
To which I oft retire, — an ancient place:
(It once belonged unto some man of taste,
The ground being strewed with beauteous chizelled stones,)
There, 'midst the ruined heaps and withered trees,
I sometimes muse upon my father's home, —
Now sunk into a devastation wild:
Being once engaged in that sequestered place,
My hour of solitude and musing sweet
Was suddenly disturbed by unchaste steps;
Two men I saw in earnest colloquy, —
I heard them talk of Haman and the King.
Soon I discovered their vile purpose was
To slay your Majesty. I stayed no more,
But, stealing quietly away from them,
I ran, with haste, unto the palace-gate;

There, met I Prince Memucan ; him I told
My fearful secret : — he, it was, great king,
Who, faithful to his duty and to you,
Appointed guards to take those wretched men,
Teres and Bigthan, in their lurking place,
Where they were found with implements of death :
And thence being brought to justice, they confessed
Their horrid plot devised against the throne.

Ahas. And it is right, your faithfulness be met
With some distinct and public deference : —
Expect a mandate from the king to-day !

Exit MORDECAI.

Hear, Shalaman, this business must be done
With all despatch, lest prejudice arise
And offer opposition to our will.
Fetch Haman here.

Shal. Great King he stands without,
Waiting your gracious favor.

Ahas. Let him in.

Enter HAMAN.

Haman, all greet you merrily ! What news ? —

Haman. Nothing of moment, Sir, beyond "All's well."

Ahas. Well! that is something in a mighty realm;
I thought it otherwise, you being here
Before your usual earliness to-day.

Ham. My lord, I was compelled to come; I heard
The lamentable rumours of the night:
And I concluded, ere I heard the half,
That all the world would put their mourning on,
And this exalted kingdom be no more:
But, now I see your countenance, my lord,
My dark forebodings pass, as clouds, away,
When the sun's face illuminates the earth.

Ahas. It gives me pleasure to speak well of you:
Such constant evidence I daily find
Of your unwearied diligence and care,
That every day another instance brings
Of further glory in this realm of ours.

Ham. Your will I have most diligently done,
And now prosperity is all I see.

Ahas. As you have done my will, so would I yours,
By taking your sage counsel in a case.
There lives a man, lord Haman, not far hence,
Whose deeds are well recorded in our mind;
And, as it is our pleasure to bestow

Such favour on him as his deeds deserve,
I ask, in Persia's name, what you would do,
To make the nation honor such a man ?
Let it be something noble, something new,
Something to catch attention from all eyes.

Haman. One moment for consideration, Sir ;
A boon so great requires a cautious thought.
HAMAN *retires a short distance.*
Whom can he mean this honor for but me ? (*aside.*)
" There lives a man not far hence ; " — Ah ! that 's I.
" Whose deeds are well recorded ; " — such are mine :
Another opportunity is here ; —
I see another step may now be gained
Towards the summit of my future good.
The nation holds me in its eye : — what then ?
Its admiration must be magnified ! —
They must be dazzled, — taken by surprise, —
Caught — captivated — brought to worship me.
If I could wear the semblance of a king, —
I might prepare them for another king.
I see ! — I see ! the horse, — the robe, — the crown ! —
(*musing*).

Ahas. addresses Shalaman.
I think, if he should ask of me a thing
Almost preposterous, I 'd grant that thing.
There is, in him, a vast sagacity

Which puts a question on his words and deeds :
There is a daring singularity
In most of his exploits, that when one hears
Their first announcement, it is hard to guess
What may the issue of the purpose be.
And, in a simple thing like this in hand,
Five minutes' occupation of his mind
Will form some plan so suited to the case,
That self and choice, in every other man,
When they have heard, shall quickly say, "'tis well."
Observe how suitable his words shall be
To do to Mordecai the very thing
Which best shall meet th' occasion of the act.

HAMAN *comes forward.*

Ahas. Our expectation is excited now ;
Let men be honored as each man deserves.

Haman. Amen, say I, my lord ; honor to all !
Now, in this present instance, I can see
A person of no common character
Has gained th' approval of your majesty,
By a wise course of brilliant servitude :
And, as in Persia it has ever been
The law to give to every man his due,
There needs a stretch of favor, in this case,
Beyond the usual and expected meed ;
That being implied in the complacency

The King has just expressed himself to feel
Towards the man for honor set apart.
This, therefore, is my counsel in the case : —
Let the royal purple, which the King doth wear, —
Let the royal horse, on which the King doth ride, —
And let the royal crown upon his head—(*Ahas. frowns*),
And let the royal robe and royal horse
Be now delivered to some noble prince,
E'en such an one as great Memucan here,
And, with these outward marks of kingly pomp,
Let them array at once the honored man
Whom King Ahasuerus thus exalts ;
And let the heralds go before, and say,
"Thus be it ever done to him alone,
To honor whom it is the king's delight."

Ahas. Most admirable counsel ! So, make haste,
And take my purple robe and royal horse,
And to the fullest meaning of your words,
Accomplish all on Mordecai, the Jew, —
E'en him, who sits alone at the King's Gate.
Here is the robe (*disrobing himself*), and outside waits the horse,
Not for myself but Mordecai to ride.

Exit HAMAN, *hastily.*

Ahas. Is not th' idea excellent and good ?

And so are all his counsels ; other men
Speak, as if guided by one common mind ;
Whilst he, beyond all teaching, from himself
Draws forth a lesson for th' admiring world.
But, hark ! the trumpets witness to the haste,
With which good Haman entertains our will :
Come, Lord Memucan, Shalaman, and all,
To see the glory of our royal Jew. *Exeunt.*

Scene II. — *A Balcony.*

Esther *and* Zelza. (*Trumpets heard.*)

Esther. The trumpet speaks with a portentous voice.

Zelza. O, lady Esther, every sound to me
Is full of mystery. To-day my bird
Came to my hand in his familiar way ;
But, while he chirped a little symphony,
Discordant feelings agitated me :
I offered no caressing ; and his wings
And little feathers drooped, and ruffled up ;
Then to his perch he fled disconsolate : —
I see affliction, now, in every thing.

Enter Hatach, *suddenly.*

Hatach. I must intrude upon you, for I bring

A wonderful announcement to your ears, —
I'm breathless with my haste !

Esther. Is death begun ?

Hatach. Say, rather, life and glory to the world !

Esther. Which cannot be, till we are raised again.

Hatach. They are exalting noble Mordecai !
I saw him mounted on the royal horse,
And clothed in kingly purple ; and the world
Seemed flocking round, in merriment and joy,
To do him homage by the King's command.

Esther. Know you the reason ?

Hatach. I stayed not to ask.

Zelza. Omens be disregarded from this time !

Esther. Go, Zelza, join the gladsome multitude :
May Inspiration give you power to sing !
And I, in grateful wonder, will retire. *Exeunt.*

SCENE III. — *Before the Palace.*

A MARCH.

Enter HERALDS *with Trumpets, and* MORDECAI *clothed in a purple robe, and riding on the richly-caparisoned horse of* AHASUERUS, *and led by* HAMAN, ATTENDANTS, CHORUS, &c. &c.

Herald. The man who is exalted thus, is Mordecai the Jew;
Thus be it ever done,
To him, and him alone,
Whose glorious deeds the King delights to own.

Enter ZELZA *and* CHORUS.

Zelza. Who is this man that rideth thus in regal glory? Who?

Herald. The man who is exalted thus, is Mordecai, the Jew.

Zelza. Thus be it ever done,
To him and him alone.

Chorus. What man is this that rideth thus in regal glory? Who?

Zelza. The man who is exalted thus, is Mordecai, the Jew!
Whose glorious deeds of victory the king will ever own.

Mord. Think not, my friends, that I your worship seek:
I cannot guess, why I am thus upraised :
I did my duty as a loyal man
(Which all of you, I trust, will ever be).
Whoever sits by right on Persia's throne
Is Persia's King by God's supreme command ;
No man can rule one day, but by God's will :
And every man who dares to use his power,
Be it only in a look, or idle word,
In oppositon to th' anointed brow,
Is held a rebel 'gainst the throne of Heaven.
How then could I, with these truths guiding me,
Become aware of Bigthan's vile intent,
And keep my silence ? — yet, — because I spoke,
And simply did what I was bound to do,
The king has thus exalted me to-day,
Who, yesterday, was clothed in sackcloth vile :
To day in purple, glittering as a prince,
And on the morrow will again resume
The badge, which most becomes my fallen state.

Chorus. Hail Mordecai ; the Jew !
To him and him alone,
Thus be it ever done,
Whose glorious deeds of victory the king will ever own

Exeunt.

Scene IV. — *A Garden.*

Zeresh, *seated.*

The following Song is heard at a distance.

Every changing season,
  Wearing native beauty,
Plainly gives a reason,
  That man should do his duty.
Man is taught his seed-time,
  O'er the furrows bending; —
Short days make him heed time
  While, through his toil-path wending.

Zeresh. I like these Hebrew songs; and yet, I think,
The music has assumed a sharper key;
For oft, as I have sat me down at eve,
Their songs have touched me with an air of grief,
And stole my melancholy soul away
To scenes of ruined walls and fallen power,
Till all the world, I thought, was vanity:
But now their notes do strangely harmonize
With this most unexpected happy day:
This morning seems to promise brighter days.

Enter Haman.

Step here, my lord, and gaze upon this sky, —

The clouds are rolled in such fantastic shapes,
That you might fancy ——

Haman. I fancy nothing : —
I am a man for facts, and leave your tints,
And clouds, and lines, to do your painting by.
Fancy I hate ! I see one glaring fact,—
That gibbet dangling idly in the air :
I wish his withered bones were bleaching there !

Zeresh. My lord, retire ! you are beside yourself,
The tumult of the day has overcome you.

Haman. Beside myself ! I wish I were, this day,
A vacant-pated fool, without a thought :
Is it not maddening, to behold a wretch,—
Refusing, first, the homage due to me, —
Whilst every neck was bending, his erect ; —
And, then, to be uplifted to a state
Of grandeur fitting only for myself ?
And this is all the hubbub — this the fire
That raised the palace to a midnight roar !—
A feverish night-thought, silly quaint conceit,
That set the household wondering ! for what ?—
To clothe a beggar in a purple robe,
And make a gewgaw stare in Shushan's streets !
But, think, that I should have to act the part

Of vassal to his foolship through the street! —
'Tis unendurable! I'm deeply stung, —
And I shall strike: I care not whom I hit:
My vengeance shall be full! It 's not enough
That all the Jews shall perish in one day; —
Such retribution meets the first offence:
The next must have my thoughts!

Zeresh. My lord, retire.

Haman. I'll not retire! I'll press the business on,
Till every inch of my far-reaching will
Is on my victim coiled! Were I a snake,
For only one half hour around his neck,
I would myself the work of hangman do,
And, in deliberate vengeance, watch his end, —
Stifling his too-late efforts to repent!

Zeresh. Well, then, I leave you to your woful thoughts.
Exit ZERESH.

Haman. Go, — go! I'd rather be alone! Alone?
I'm not alone; — alone I never am.
My very thoughts address me; — stupid thoughts; —
Vile personations of some lying tongue
That filled my inflated throat, but yesterday,
With words of adulation for myself.
I talked of Haman, — to, and with myself:

'Twas his praise that I sung, when I did sing:
But, now, these flattering spirits change their tone,
And make me curse myself; they hasten me
To violence. I've seen and heard of men,
Who, having drunk excessively of wine,
Were, afterwards, in a strange fit involved,
And fancied they could see a thousand fiends
Aping and grinning, shooting forth their eyes,
With menaces and antics coming close,
And closer still, till they shrieked out for fear:
But I am worse than they; not fearing, I
With my familiar spirits am most free;
I follow as they prompt me; as they wish
I willingly perform; and, did one say,
That I must do the most outrageous act
Of wickedness on earth, I must reply,
"Devil, your most devoted slave am I!"

Re-enter ZERESH.

Zeresh. I do entreat you to compose yourself!

Haman. Ay! did not I, at your request, erect
That gallows which is there, unoccupied?

Zeresh. Next time I come I hope to find you calm.
Exit ZERESH.

Haman. A Jew on horseback! O, the hypocrite!

I heard the fellow say, he could not ride.
One day, while sitting at the outer gate,
With half a score of little children round,
I heard him whimper, doting as he spoke
His trashy lies about some tribe of his,
From cabalistic parchments, black with use,
Which, he pretended, was an oracle
Descended from some god, who promised them
Aid in their battles, on this one condition,—
"They would not ride on horses in their wars:"
And, now, the wretch is mounted, as a king,
Taking my place, and drinking down my praise,
As if by witchery (which he deeply knows),
My head had been dissevered from my trunk,
And his abomination grafted on.

Enter ESTHER

Esther. You seem, lord Haman, to be deeply wrought
Into a strange commotion, unlike you.

Haman. I do confess, high lady, that I am.
It grieves me sore to see that recreant Jew
Clothed with sueh honor, which he never earned.

Esther. The record is, he saved your noble life.

Haman. My life!

Esther. Your's, and your lady's, and the king's.

Haman. I do confess, high lady, that he did ;
And in my heart this principle is fixed,
To give to every man what he deserves.
I doubt not, he deserves a meed of praise, —
Legal acquittal for his evidence
(Which haply might have implicated him), —
A cold acquittal, — but not regal pomp.

Esther. Was he a party, then, in that foul plot ?
If I might judge by his fine countenance,
He is not treacherous, but boldly true.

Haman. Hypocrisy has no mark in the face :
Deep in the soul it lies, a hidden power, —
Living, but never seen ; and, one by one,
The members of the man are brought to play
Their ill-inspired parts, whilst all the rest,
Apparently engaged in other things,
Are only waiting for their turn to act.
The very name of Jew to me's enough ;
One answers for them all ; one family
They all profess to be ; unmingled they
With any other people but themselves ;
Tribe marries into tribe ; and so, in all,
Conspicuous points of character are seen :

In every place you find them ; as a scum
Floats from the whirling eddy to the bank,
So these are but the outcasts of the world,
Without a king, a city, or a name.

Esther. Do they not labour for their livelihood ?

Haman. Only because we make them work as slaves.

Esther. And yet they seem contented in their toil ;—
For oft, when night has closed Persia's eyes,
They welcome her with some new song,
Luring her from those haunts of savage men,
And fierce, devouring beasts, who wait her beck
To lead them on to devastation wild.

Haman. It well becomes you, fairest queen on earth,
To speak thus mildly of your enemies :
And I do reckon it more honor far,
Than Mordecai can boast of, thus to speak,
And thus to be addressed ; yet I opine,
This truly abject race will be our bane.

Esther. Nay, let us hope for better things in them :
This exaltation may inspirit them,
As wintry trees wake at the voice of spring,
And cheer mankind with promises of fruit.

They number but a few compared with us :
We, therefore, need not fear such enemies :
And as, you say, they work,—Oh ! let them live.

Haman. Much rather would they live without employ;
Like hungry birds, they walk in labour's rear.

Esther. And industry can spare a grain or two
For every bird that chirps a craving note ;
And I have oft been told by husbandmen
That these same birds, which follow as they work,
Pick up the vermin from the opened ground.

Haman. The birds that I alluded to, fair Queen,
Are birds of carrion, destroying life ;
Therefore they truly illustrate the Jews,
Who boast of numerous slaughters : at their feasts,
I'm told that every thing is stained with blood
Of sacrifices, day by day observed

Esther. Do you allow of sacrifice ?

Haman. I do.
In Macedonia we are strict, at times,
When fever rages, or there comes a blight,
Or should a battle go against us, — then,
We pray like other people, for awhile.

Esther. And do you strict devotion, then, condemn ?

Haman. Condemn ? Oh, no, I think 'tis passing well.

Esther. And would be better, were it practised more?

Haman. Provided always that the creed were sound.
(This cross examination is most strange (*aside*)).

Esther. Come now, lord Haman, you must look this way,
And tell me, as you are an honest man,—
Provided that the Jewish creed be right ?

Haman. It is not right ! — your pardon, gracious Queen !
I spoke without consideration then ;
But prejudice will sometimes start the tongue,
Before our prudence has the bridle seized.

Esther. Provided that the Jewish creed be sound,
They are not culpable in their long prayers ?

Haman. High born and gracious lady, I confess,
I am not friendly to their ways at all.
(I wish I were a hundred miles away (*aside*)).
True, I allowed 't was right in men to pray ;

But then, I spoke of fevers, battles, blights,
And such like plagues, which, now and then, occur.

Esther. And, then, you do allow 'tis right to pray :
Now, I have gained you over to my side ;
For these poor Jews are troubled every day, —
Hereditary slaves and fallen men :
And, therefore, Haman, you are too severe
In passing sentence on their better deeds.
You will allow me for awhile t'enforce
My thoughts upon your notice, for I know
A something more than soldiers mostly do,
Of temple customs, and of sacrifice :
I say, then, strange as it may seem to you,
The rites and ceremonies of the Jews
Are all designed by God, to be the guide
Of men who would commend themselves to Heaven :
And these poor slaves, now subject to your scorn,
Are destined to stand foremost in the world.

Haman. But where are such things stated of the Jews ?

Esther. Throughout the pages of their history,
Which bears the impress of a higher Hand,
Than that which gives a common narrative ;
And that same Hand appointed sacrifice,

To be an everlasting service, kept
In some vast temple, for that purpose built;
Which other nations, in a less degree,
Observe; because, through error or neglect,
They have been less instructed than the Jews.
And, now, to meet th' objection you have urged
Against the slaughters in their daily rites: —
As you allow, in Macedon, at times,
That sacrifice is lawful, these good men
Profess the slaughters which they daily make
Point to some great Atonement yet to come,
Through which all nations shall to happiness
And wealth, and settled peace, be brought in time;
And, strange as you may think it, truly strange,
Through the belief of that great sacrifice,
A conscience, sunk in guilt, can find repose. —
Haman! will you believe, and be at peace?

Haman. Astonishment, and madness! I, believe?
Believe a Jew! believe a slaughtered sheep!
And honored with the name of stranger, too,
Amidst that beggarly and tattered crew!
Out indignation must! Hear me, you rave!

Esther. 'Tis you that rave, lord Haman, and not I.
What I have said, I offer you again,
As reasonable matter for your thoughts.
Why you should hate the Jews, I cannot tell.

Haman. I spoke of their religion, not of them.

Esther. 'Tis that I recommend : but, I perceive,
That prejudice hath so far blinded you ;
And you do show such bitterness at heart
That in this case, your judgment cannot act :
And, statesman as you are, your sober mind
Is tossed with inward throes of pent-up rage :
To that, and every other bitter plague
Of a maliciously disposed will,
I recommend your most attentive care ;
Lest haply, in some sudden dangerous time,
The tumult of your thoughts lead you away,
From sober bearing to offensive speech. *Exit* ESTHER.

Haman. Who can explain the wonders of this day ?
Exit HAMAN.

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE I. — *A retired place in a Garden.*

HAMAN, ARIOCH, SEPHAR.

Haman. By circumstances I am greatly pressed ;
And I must hasten to the perfecting
And bringing out of all my purposes.
Now will I plainly ask of my two friends,
By what suggestions you to Shushan came.

Arioch. Ambition brought me here ; and next to that,
A firm devotedness to you, my lord.

Haman. And to what ultimate expectancy,
Did your ambition lead you when you came ?

Arioch. To be a conquering soldier is my aim ;
So far, together, we have had success,
And still, at Haman's side, I hope to rise.

Sephar. In a few words, I will declare myself.
To live where Haman lives, is all I wish ;
I have no relish for the battle-field,
Having, from earliest days, bestowed myself
To searching out the causes, principles,
And nature of the sphere in which we live ;
Therefore my highest aim will ever be
The opportunity and privilege
Of entering well into philosophy : —
By you, my lord, I have been satisfied
With the full entertainment of my will,
In the investigation of such things,
As suits the inclination of my mind.

Haman. Listen, my friends; as you have honored me
With the recital of your sentimeuts,
I shall at once declare, that, first of all,
My strongest purpose is to give you yours :—

Yet, in the doing and receiving that,
There are some obstacles to overcome.
From earliest days, my nature is to rule,
And, from the first, I 've held that principle,
As heart and centre of my faculties:
So far, success has brightly marked my path,
And in th' ascendant I have ever been.
A man was made to rise; and if he fail
To reach the summit of his destiny,
The fault is in himself; a proper mind
Will outdo opposition, to the end.
But here, I am unfortunately placed,
Next to the King in power and dignity: —
When I was fourth or fifth I might ascend;
But being second is to me the sign
That I unto promotion's highest point
Have access gained; and there I must remain.
I may put on the purple of the King, —
I may ride forth upon the royal horse, —
Yet, if I make allusion to the crown,
I see the thunder gathering in his eye.
I feel by resting here, I set at nought
The aspirations of a burning soul.
Thus, as the nature of enjoyment is
The wise fulfilment of our own desires,
My very place becomes a prison-house,
Where all my energies are so hemmed in,
By the superior nature of a King,

That my great leading principle of life
Must, henceforth, be inactive in my soul.

Sephar. Hear me, my lord; the course of my own thoughts
Has run in league with your most temperate speech.
In thinking o'er the matters of this day,
And picturing to myself the foolishness
(That I had too much scorn to go and see,)
Of hoisting, to a puppet sort of state,
A Jew, whom no man ever knew before, —
And then, to think of honoring you, my lord,
With the high place and splendid dignity,
Of leading forth his ragged majesty! —
Hey me! it makes me laugh to speak of it.

Haman. Refer not to it, friend; that foolishness,
Though galling at the onset, proves a cause
Of rousing all the yearning faculties
Within the comprehension of a man:
I feel, as some untamed and caged beast,
Which leaps against the boundaries of his den,
Bruising himself into more desperate rage,
In ceaseless efforts for his liberty.
How dared Ahasuerus force my will?
What, if he be a king? is my will nought?
And am I a mere pauper in the realm, —

A wretched slave that works for what he gets,
That offers service for a salary ? —
I came to Persia for no such thing !
I came from Macedon, where every man
Has, in himself, the essentials of a man.

Arioch. As we have severally said, my lord,
Whatever aid you may require of us,
Is at your service, to the uttermost.
And, let lord Haman also understand,
As we now speak the whole of Persia feels.

Sephar. Assume the government !

Haman. Stay, Sephar, stay !
The government is, now, in my own hands,
But I am not the king.

Sephar. Yet kings may die.

Haman. To slay a man, and then to take his place,
Is the most worn-out page of history.
If I could render him incapable
Of holding on his duties in the state ? ——

Sephar. You look to me, my lord, as if you thought
I had a medicine, which would have th' effect.

Haman. I thought, not of the medicine, but the mind
Of him, who knows when medicine should be given.

Sephar. I have a secret, which, as yet, to none
Has been divulged, and that might haply tell
So forcibly that he would sigh for death.

Haman. Indeed !

Sephar. A little while ago, my lord,
I met with evidence, which proves to me,
That Esther is deranged : and that, I think,
Will, as a certain medicine, have th' effect
Of rendering the king unfit to rule.

Haman. Oh, man, you turn our gravity to sport !
It is not serious, but farcical : —
As if a man should think his wife were mad,
Simply because the doctor told him so.
You doctors find a cause for every thing ;
And, if one be a little out of course,
You see some symptoms of insanity.

Sephar. As I was passing, unexpectedly,
I saw the Queen disturbed with violence
Of look and gesture, and I cannot doubt
That, by some strong excitement, not yet known,
Her reason is most hopelessly destroyed.

Haman. There are emotions in that lady's mind,
Which our poor callous nature never feels.
May not a man be racked with inward throes
Without being called a madman ? May not I,
If desperation take my faculties,
Deliberately attack my vital part,
And, in a reasonable quiet mood,
Seize and destroy in me the power to live ? —
But, let us leave philosophy for facts.

Arioch. We have set out upon a dangerous road ;
And, not by haste, but cautious policy,
May we expect success : those luckless men,
Bigthan and Teres, perished through their haste.

Haman. What bunglers in their enterprise were they!
To kill Ahasuerus was their scheme,
And so they hid themselves behind the bed.
Most stupid plot ! most unsagacious act !
Why little boys can play at hide and seek.
They never read a legend in their lives,
Or, they had learnt more subtlety at least
In hatching mischief, which they brooded long,
And practised something better than the haste
Which broke the egg a week before the time :
As, when a lumpish boy, by grandame told
To salt their tails before he caught his birds,

With wondering joy drinks in the rich advice,
And creeps with grinning face and outstretched hand,—
Those blockheads, counselled by their own dull brain,
Supposed the King would rush into their arms.
Not so will Haman act. I 've counsel here,
Which takes experience from another's fall : —
So, when a seaman, sailing near a shore,
Being yet uncertain of his dangerous course,
Sees suddenly, behind a crested wave,
The broken top-mast of some deep-wrecked ship,
Slacks all his canvass, instantly bouts ship,
And, with vast caution, tries another tack. *Exeunt.*

SCENE II. — *The Garden.*

ESTHER, MORDECAI.

Mord. Let us refrain from weeping, and, in hope,
Anticipate a favorable end.

Esther. I've told you, father, what I mean to do.

Mord. To say you are a Jewess is your death.

Esther. I cannot help it ; I must say the truth.

Mord. To say the truth, at all times, is not wise.

Esther. In this extremity, who can be wise ?
When youthful David first advanced to fight,

The wary king gave him a coat of mail;
But, his young zeal being by the armour cramped,
He threw it from him as a cumbrous load;
And leaping forward in his native strength,
In firm reliance on the unseen God,
With heaven-caught radiance in his daring eye,
He flung the stone which struck the giant dead.
Where is the God of David? — He is mine!

Mord. Patience and self-possession, at such times,
Have saved men frequently from coming death.

Esther. You have at times remarked, that women act
By sudden impulse in extremities:
Heaven grant me, then, to be impelled by good!

Mord. I fear, lest in your zeal, you should declare
Your kindred to his ill-affected ear.
Say but the word, and you are spurned away.

Esther. Was Joseph spurned away from Pharaoh's
court?

Mord. Enough, my daughter, you have argued well;
I can, most certainly, entrust you now:
And if I did express my foolish fears,
They 're passed away before my dawning hope.

Esther. Good Mordecai, all confidence in self
Has not yet found existence in my soul.
But as you give me, now, to understand,
So I most heartily receive the truth,—
"I came unto the throne for this one thing,
To save my people at a time like this."

Mord. Here, let us part. If ne'er to meet again,
May God be with us at the hour of death!
Farewell, my honored child!— once more, farewell!
(*They embrace each other, and depart different ways.*)

Enter HAMAN

The Gods are helping me! I shall succeed!
Most wonderful concurrence! Kneel I must!—
Whilst waiting there, in aspiration strong,
That some unseen and potent agency
Would visit me with supernatural help,—
Most wonderful concurrence!—there they stood,
In full unconsciousness of attitude,—
In open air embraces, fixed and mute,
As sculptured figures placed for every eye.
Were I not sure, I could deny myself
Of my most mischief-making faculty,
And say I dreamt the thing of her,—of both:
But justice to my friend binds me to speak;
She is his wife. Ah, ah! most precious fact!

And yet the matter is so truly strange,
So reasonably opposed to truth,
He never will believe me, though I swear.
I cannot have a witness : I, alone :—
These stones are witness that I'm not deceived.
I heard a voice ! Who's there ? I'm not alone !
(*Claps his hands*) Oh, oh ! I see it is an echo's voice
Which startled me at first. Speak, Echo ! speak
A word or two of their voluptuous vows !—
I dare not tell him : yet, the truth must out,
I'll speak about the matter to myself ;
And talk, in such a way, that he may hear.

(*Enter* AHASUERUS *in the distance.*)

What ! wonder after wonder, here he comes !
Now, will I speak in deep abstractedness,
Yet he shall hear what will disturb his peace.
(*Speaks loudly*) I knew it would be so — I told him so :
To place most unaffected confidence
In a mere stranger, and untutored too : —
Why did my King call me his friend at all ? —
I knew it would be so, — I told him so.
I'd rather die than let the secret out !

(AHASUERUS *comes forward.*)

Ahas. You seem perplexed, good Haman, in your mind.

Haman. No, no, my lord ; a little play of words,
By way of exercise in eloquence :

Statesmen, who speak, must play the orator.
'Tis good to exercise those parts we need
In necessary labour: boys at school
Spout forth their lessons in some secret place,
Before they meet the awful countenance
Of their preceptor, with his swinging cane
Ready to fall, where his displeased eye
Conveys a wish the task were better learnt.

Ahas. If I mistake not, Haman, what I heard
Was some instructive lesson meant for me;
And I, as your preceptor, do much wish
To prove the aptness of my noble scholar.

Haman. My words were not designed for you to hear.

Ahas. Yet, as you justly said, the boy at school
Worked up his lesson by such exercise
As I, perchance, beheld you acting here:—
I would, now, know what this your lesson is.

Haman. It would much grieve me to explain the case.
The wisest and the best of men at times,
Commit themselves unto a foolish act:—
In every man there is a feeble point,
Which none should know, except the man himself.

Ahas. Haman, I always count you wise and good,

Ready in counsel, and my friend indeed:
And I conceive your slight infirmity,
With which I have become acquainted here,
Might be a further study for myself
To ascertain my own degree of fault.

Haman. Let it, my lord, be reckoned as mere sport:
Without design, the truant words escaped
My lips, by fancied solitude unlocked.

Ahas. Haman, you know my mind; and I know yours.
You were lamenting that I called you friend,
Bewailing o'er the obligation, felt
By duteous bonds existing in your soul,
To tell me something not yet known to me.
Tell me the whole! I cannot be denied.

Haman. The Queen is in the business!

Ahas. Who? the Queen?
Business! she knows it not; being yet unlearned
(And so I trust she ever may remain,)
In every thing, but that which most becomes
The best of women, and the best of Queens.

Haman. I wish you had not heard me: as I said,
'Twas a mere talk at random: let me go.

Ahas. Do boys get up their lessons for mere sport?
Do statesmen, for mere sport, talk themselves hoarse?
Do bosoms heave at random? No, Haman, no!
I have not learnt, to-day, to judge of facts.
I saw you well; not with a passing glance:
And, as there is a line which demarcates
Between unreal and real, I clearly judge,
From your impassioned words and countenance,
That most important facts for me to know
Lie closeted within your mind, and cry,
Imploringly, for utterance of the truth.

Haman. I could not help the knowledge that I have;
I did not study it; but all at once,
As by foul inspiration, I was filled
With blasting sight of horrid certainty.

Ahas. Make haste! I quake with most intense desire
To know the worst: I covet agony!

Haman. Queen Esther is not righteous.

Ahas. Prove,—go on!

Haman. My eyes beheld her ——

Ahas. Doing what?

Haman. Kiss him.

Ahas. You did ?

Haman. I did, indeed !

Ahas. I don't believe you !

Haman. Am I then false ?

Ahas. You are if Esther is.
Say not his name : — I've heard enough to-day.
'Tis well I love you more than other men !
Say not his name at present ! As I live,
Could I have fancied what you have declared,
My own conjecture would have been my death !
O Heaven, take cognizance of what I feel !
If there be people there I'll make them hear :
(Calling loudly towards heaven),
I solemnly believe my wife is true !

Haman. I will retire awhile, and then return. *Exit.*

Ahas. If I believe him, I shall hate my wife,—
Abhor her, — kill her, — and then kill myself !
I 'll not believe him ! Yesterday, — to-day, —
She was as excellent as heretofore, —

And yet he is familiar with her crimes !
Her word for his ! I'll wait for evidence, —
And her chaste looks are louder than his words :
I'll be my own witness, counsel, judge, and law ;
And, if she die, she shall in secret die !
Where is the use of publishing her crimes ?
And where the use of vengeance ? Will that make
Her death more lovely, or my life more sweet ?
The thought is maddening, that a tale, like this,
Should crush my glory in a single hour !
Reflection's bliss, — anticipation's joy, —
Connubial satisfaction, — all are gone ! —
Gone, as the brilliant scenes of opening life
Flit from the drowsy brain of dying youth !
And now my wretched soul, with back on world,
Seems gazing giddily on some dark depth
Of everlasting questioning " What's to come ?"

Re-enter HAMAN.

Ahas. You've damaged me for ever !

Haman. Spake I first ?
Did I not shun, most carefully, to speak ?
Did you not wring the truth from me ?

Ahas. I did, —
I did ! and there's the misery for us both :

'Twere better that we die, and let her live.
We both are villains, if she be untrue;
But circumstance hath not put forth our crimes.
Depend upon it, Haman, you are wrong.
I question much your right to judge your Queen.

Haman. I judged her not: I merely stated facts.

Ahas. Tell me the matter o'er again. Yet, stay,
I cannot bear to hear it o'er again.
You said, you saw a man embrace my wife?

Haman. I saw his tinkering fingers on her neck.

Ahas. Speak not so harshly; speak in milder tones:
You say you saw the man: — did she kiss him?

Haman. She did, my lord; as Haman lives, she did!

Ahas. You live to make me wretched, knowing this:
Had you been dead, the secret were not out:
But now you live, each moment to recal
The truth, that some one else knows my disgrace.

Haman. Disgrace, my lord! disgrace for the disgraced!
They are disgraced who practise wickedness.

Ahas. They are, or shall be, I most surely know!
But how could Esther practise wickedness?
If she were any thing but what is right,
E'en in her looks or thoughts, it might be so;
But, morals dwell with her, as clustering grapes
Hang from the slender branches of the vine:—
Weak in itself, it needs a friendly prop
On which to find support; and then it grows
In rich luxuriance of leaves and fruit,
O'ershadowing, with its glory, all the place
Whence it derives support and nourishment:—
So, Esther might have perished in the world,
Little, unheard of, unobserved, unknown:
But now, o'er Shushan's palaces, she spreads
Lessons of truth, which all may daily learn.
I had no conscience till I talked with her;
And how could she do good if she were vile?
But these are profitless expressions, all!
In half an hour I'll talk with you again.

Exeunt separately.

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE I. — *Interior of Palace.*

SEPHAR *meeting* AHASUERUS.

Sephar. I bring most serious words unto the King,

Ahas. Physicians mostly deal in serious things:
Speak you of health, or life, or death, or what?

Sephar. I speak of one, in exaltation high
And, next your majesty, esteemed by all.

Ahas. Do you allude to Haman, or the Queen?

Sephar. I grieve to say, that on the Queen's account
I came before my lord, to-day, to state
Some fearful facts, and then await your will.

Ahas. A sudden accident? not loss of life?
Say quickly, does she live?

Sephar. My lord, she lives,
But seems to live in strange bewilderment.

Ahas. Bewilderment at what? explain yourself!

Sephar. Glad should I be, if I could comprehend,
The strange comportment of her majesty :
Less than two hours ago, I saw the Queen ;
Her countenance begrimed with tears and dust,
Her head was unadorned, her hair unbound !
She walked at random, stopping as she walked,
And then, with clenched hands, she gazed to heaven,
And smote upon her breast, and wept aloud ;
And then she wildly laughed —

Ahas. Stay ! say no more :
Delusion has possessed her : — next, the cause
Must be examined into — were you called
To see her, as physician, or, by chance,
Did you observe these strange anomalies ?

Sephar. Nothing I knew, till, walking in the court,
She passed without observing me, as if
Intent on something, yet, on nothing fixed ;
And not being called, I suddenly drew back ;
Yet felt by conscience bound to stand and look.

Ahas. How many more, think you, the matter know?

Sephar. Besides myself, I think, my lord, but one.

Ahas. And who is he ?

Sephar. I asked lord Haman's thoughts.

Ahas. Well, what thought he ?

Sephar. He laughed me into doubt
Of my own knowledge.

Ahas. Noble, noble man !
Physic must yield to Haman ! said he aught
Of this, or any other circumstance ?

Sephar. He said, it might be well t' acquaint the king.

Ahas. Take care the matter be not further known.—
See me again to-morrow at this time. *Exit* SEPHAR.
This is most terrible intelligence !
What desperate influence can have touched her mind ?
The vast transition from her former state
To regal grandeur may have shaken her ;
And yet her grace is wonderful withal : —
Some ground for his opinion I have seen ; —
Those tales of history were beyond the truth, —
And yet I saw no incoherence there : —
This second matter may explain the first,
If that most dreadful thing may be explained.
To have a mad wife is a fearful thing, —

To have a faithless one is worse than death !
Oh, horrible ! my patience cannot bear
The exercise of prudence for awhile.
Make haste, O hours, and give me further light !
I dare not, cannot, will not yet believe
Haman's preposterously wicked tale.
I see it may be false ; 'twas some one else :
Fool that I was not to have thought of that ;
Fool, too, to take his word in such a case.
I did not ask the time when it occurred, —
The party's name, — the place of wickedness :
As for her madness, Haman laughed at that,
And so will I ; — 'twas the mere exercise
And womanly display of sentiment :
She must have fallen on th' unwary neck
Of one who came, perchance, to offer help, —
And that is most unpleasant to my thoughts.
Come, quietness and patience, to my help ! *Exit.*

SCENE II. — *Hall in the Palace.*

ZELZA. — HATACH.

Zelza. This is a day of misery or joy !
I do not feel that overwhelming grief,
Which I thought death, in foresight, would create :
A calmness has arisen in my soul,

Since I beheld the firmness of the Queen.
That, she can undertake the mighty task
Of meeting Haman and his policy,
And hope to controvert the King's decree,
Is the effect of steady faith in God.

Hatach. Yes : I perceived that, when she said "farewell."

Zelza. Did you dissuade her, or encourage her ?

Hatach. I only said these words, — "Have faith in God !"
And I have spent some time in silent prayer
To that great God to whom a slave may speak.
I have a firm assurance in my breast
That our brave Queen will triumph o'er her foe.

Zelza. He is a foe : you say the truth in that.

Hatach. Haman delights in acts of cruelty.
One day I stood, uncovered, an hour and more,
Beneath the broiling pungency of noon ;
And, as I thought (perhaps I was deceived),
He lingered needlessly about the place,
Holding me fixed in servile attitude.
"Blackey !" said he, "your head is made of wool,

And, therefore, will the heat not enter you."
I tried to smile, but anguish hindered me :
And, if my humbleness had dared to speak,
I should have uttered some such words as these : —
"What if my hair be woolly ? is my skull
So packed with wadding that I cannot think ?"
And when he thus had treated me, he turned,
And stroked his horse's neck, and said, "Brave nag,
I value thee above thy weight in gold !"

Zelza. You would outweigh a thousand horses' worth.

Hatach. I own I am not perfect as the brute :
My knowledge of my state prompts me, at times,
To wince against the thankless hand of man,
'Neath which I groan in forced captivity : —
But, never yet, a word escaped my lips
Of murmuring or repining at my lot,
Which other ears, than mine, have overheard.
There is a secret place that knows my tears.

Zelza. Endeavour, Hatach, to forget these things.
Had Haman ever spoken so before ?

Hatach. I first knew slavery in his father's house ;
And there I learnt the nature of the man : —
Nothing must stand before his giant will.—

He oft has called me bywords, — "eunuch, slave,
Negro, and ape," — as if my being were
Of no account to him who made me thus! —
Oppressed humanity! thy bonds I feel!
Men think I cannot feel. I question much,
Where they to measure, by some sort of scale,
The emotion of an Ethiopian heart,
And then with one of Persian mould compare,
If justice would decide against the Black.

Zelza. Had you the power, you would not injure him?

Hatach. I'm not revengeful; I am only black!
And though, on that account, I am despised,
There is not in my soul a principle
Which burns to be revenged upon the man,
Who takes a poor delight in galling me.
Because we bear in silence all the wrongs
Which tyranny hath heaped on our weak state,
We pass, as men cut short of intellect,
And in relentless bondage end our days: —
I hold him no resentment, but I feel
The bitter degradation of a slave: —
Yet, 'tis my nature, put in me by Heaven,
To serve him with a sort of spaniel love
Who treats me as a man; love him I will!
Therefore is Mordecai most dear to me

Because he condescends to slaves like me.
O, Mordecai! I'd die for thee this hour.

Zelza. And I, and Esther, if it be required! —
I hear her footstep! Heaven protect her, now.
See, Hatach, see, she smiles and waves her hand:
Undaunted in her purpose, she will go;
And I will follow, though I perish too. *Exeunt.*

SCENE II. — *A Banqueting Room.*

AHASUERUS, HAMAN, LORDS *in attendance.*

Ahas. I am not in much humour for a feast:
To-day may pass as other days have passed,
Then let to-morrow come, and bring the worst.

Enter ESTHER, *hurriedly,*

Esther. I'm driven to extremity, my lord,
And I must speak, though speaking be my death!

Ahas. Haman retire! let every one retire.
The PRINCES *retire,* HAMAN *more slowly.*

Esther. I'm overwhelmed with unexpected grief,

And utterance not allowed, my heart will break.
Bid these depart; and I will, at your feet,
My fearful secret ——

Ahas, (*suddenly*,) Haman, stay awhile!

Esther. And, if I perish, I will perish here.
(*throws herself at his feet.*)

Ahas. Rise, Esther, rise, remember you're my Queen.

Esther. Your Queen, my lord, I am, until I speak.

Ahas. Give me your hand, my Esther: be composed.
I never saw you look so fair before.
Come, be encouraged! lean upon my arm,
And tell your husband all that troubles you.

Esther. Such comfortable words revive my soul.

Ahas. Esther, I thought I loved you till this day:
But I have heard most horrid things declared.
So strongly have your feelings been expressed,
That waywardness has seemed to mark your steps.

Esther. My grief has very nigh distracted me.

Ahas. Could grief molest you, underneath my wing?

Esther. If I might rest beneath your fostering care,
I could contented live, contented die.
But while a thousand, such as these just gone,
Are happy in the sunbeam of your eye,
I am a speckled bird, — a foreigner, —
And must be driven from the side of him
Who took me unexpecting for his mate.

Ahas. Exquisite mystery ! what do you mean ?
Esther, I must beseech you to explain !
The matter is too serious for a riddle.

Esther. My lord Ahasuerus, you have signed
A stern decree, irrevocably stern,
Which drives me into banishment and death.

Ahas. Signed what ? impossible ! what stern decree ?

Esther. That on a certain day the Jews shall die.

Ahas. Is that the cause of all your deepened grief ?
What unbecoming pity for a queen !
Esther, for shame ! (can this be artfulness ? *(aside)*)
I thought all women weak till I saw you :
Live still, a blest exception to the rule.
Such pangs of sentiment astonish me !
The people whom you pity, are a race,

The most detestable in all the world;
A wandering horde of beggars settled here,
Because there is in Shushan a vast sea
Of wealth, in which their drag is always cast.
I'm told they contemplate conspiracy,
And, without ceasing, plot against our life.

Esther. They wrong a captive people by such words.
The Jews their bondage feel, and deeply mourn
In secret, o'er their miserable state,
Not meditating vengeance on the power
That led them from their country: better taught,
They look to Heaven, and read displeasure there:
And, as by God's decree, thus far they grieve,
So only by the same decree enlarged,
Can they be more chastised. I know, men think
To persecute us further! — By God's word
We are thus troubled; by His Word we rest.

Ahas. Us persecuted! and us troubled! We!!
My Queen identify herself with them?
What strange infatuation! I'm perplexed!
Esther, I estimate your warmth of love,
Commiserating deeply with these Jews,
But I am strongly counselled by my lords
To rid my country and the world of them,
They being, without exception dangerous men.

Are they, without exception, dangerous men ?
Did not a humble man, called Mordecai,
Himself distinguish, by his loyalty ?

Ahas. He is a Jew ——

Esther. And I, a Jew's own child !

Ahas. Esther a Jew's own child ! what do I hear ?
Are you sprung from that execrable race ?
How dared you love me, Esther ? Knew you not
Companion to a King you could not be ?

Esther. Did not I tell my lord that very thing ?
And your fond answer I cannot forget,—
The horse that carried you away from fear ——

Ahas. Has never yet deceived me.

Esther. No : nor I.
Like him I've sought to lose my will in yours,
And gain the shelter of your home and mine.

Ahas. Nay ! had you told me, when I saw you first.

Esther. You said, I then was speechless, lost in thought, —

And since your pleasant lecture on the tree,
I have, most sedulously, tried to learn
Enlightening lessons from its fragrant boughs.
Your countenance, when cheerful, is my sun ;
And when 'tis grave, I feel a grateful shade :
This sweetly alternating shade and light
Is now the atmosphere in which I live ;
And from your words, as from a purest stream
Impregnating my soul with hidden life,
I daily draw my strength, as trees their sap.
So may you see, my lord, in course of time
The growing power of my native love,
Thus feeding on its lawful nourishment,
Bear full development of all the fruit,
Not such as angels, but as woman bears.

Ahas. Enough, enough, you are a lamp to me !
Effects, as I have said, must follow cause. ——
Ah ! I have been in storms, and blasts, and fire !

Esther. And I, in floods of bitterness and tears !
Ahasuerus !

Ahas. Esther !

Esther. I must speak !
My lord, I would not chide you ; but I feel —

Ahas. I know you feel : I have neglected you ;
And I, on that account, am filled with pain !

Esther. I see not there the feeblest cause of grief :
Neglect, or exile, — death, — I all can bear : —
But, oh ! the death of thousands ! — Husband, King,
Conceive what you have done by your decree !
Mothers and infants weltering in their blood !
Young children writhing on a ruffian's knife,
And screaming for their dying father's help !
O, what a scene for Heaven to look upon !
Oh dreadful man, to use such dreadful power !
How could you be so led, by one vile man ?
Stand forth, lord Haman ! I confront you here ! —
Let Mordecai, who stands without, come in.

ESTHER *beckons to* ZELZA.

HAMAN *advances, followed by the Lords in attendance; and on the opposite side* MORDECAI, ZELZA, JEWS &c.

Ahas. Confusion checks my utterance for awhile :
But that decree shall be reversed this hour !

Esther. My lord, O King, there must be no delay.

Ahas. Have you conversed with Mordecai to-day ?

Esther. I have, my lord; I do confess I have :

I may have overstepped the law, and yet,
The issue of the act condemns me not.

Ahas. A sudden burst of light comes with your words.
Is Mordecai your father ?

Esther. More, my lord,
Than father ever could be he has been.
My parents left this world when I was young,
Before my infancy affection knew ;
And he adopted me, as his own child.
(*Addressing* HAMAN.)
This is that traitor Mordecai, the man
Who was accomplice, you assured the King,
With Bigthana and Teres. Wicked man !
I leave you to his treachery and your fate.
ESTHER *retires to a couch.*

Ahas. Is this the man you saw embrace my wife ?

Haman. That is the man.

Ahas. All thanks to Heaven for that !

Mord. Lord Haman is a traitor, I affirm :
And this, and this, are with him in his plot.
(*Points to* ARIOCH *and* SEPHAR.)

(MEMUCAN *and others surround* HAMAN, *who has thrown himself in a supplicating attitude at the feet of the* QUEEN.)

Haman. Lead me not as a thief! I walk alone!
(*To* AHAS.)
Your stag's at bay: I'm growing desperate!

Ahas. I wonder that your calculating soul
Could perpetrate such feigned honesty.

Haman. I had a wish within me for your crown,
And laboured hard to get it; but I failed.
As for your prating of my subtlety,
Hypocrisy, and such like,— that is nought.
'Twas Persia's crown I wanted: ay, and now,
If I could rid the world of you, 'tis mine.

(HAMAN *rushes forward, and strikes at* AHASUERUS, *who parries the blow; the* PRINCES *seize* HAMAN.)

Esther. He's not alone: thank God, he's not alone!

Ahas. Thanks, Princes, thanks! your help gives him the lie.
He said the crown were his, if I had fallen;
By which, 't would seem, he reckoned you his friends,
To aid him in his purpose; but not so.
O, Haman! villain! and you thought to blast
The reputation of my virtuous wife!

Habbonah. The fellow has erected, at his house,*
As high, my lord, as any citadel,
A gallows ; and on that he thought to hang
Good Mordecai, known, by his noble acts,
To be a loyal man.

Ahas. Hang Haman there !

Mord. to HAMAN, *as they lead him away,*
Our God alone can help you ; call on Him !

Mem. to AHAS. And these two rebels, also pointed out?

Ahas. Hang Haman only ! let the others fly !

All. Away ! away ! we have no traitors here.
(They push them out.)

Ahas. Sit, Mordecai, henceforth, in Haman's place,
And give to every Jew full liberty.
(*To* ESTHER) Deranged, unfaithful woman ! evermore
Be at my side, that I may learn to rule,
Examine, choose and order all our laws.

Esther. My lord, this company are my true friends.

Ahas. And well prepared to celebrate this day.
(*To the Jews*) Hail, Jews of Persia! you are welcome here.

SONG.

Jews. In vain the subtle foe,
Attempts to overthrow
Our righteous throne.
Princes their power attain,
And sure allegiance gain,
And can their right maintain
By God alone.

The nation's certain light
In undisputed might
Long live the Queen.
Persians. Peace, riches, wisdom, power,
As her unceasing dower,
May Heaven daily shower
Upon our Queen.

Ahas. The whole of Persia seems to catch the flame!

All. The heroes of our land,
Shall wait for her command;
Long live the Queen.
And men of all degree,
Bowing the willing knee,
In happy loyalty
Shall bless the Queen.

THE END.